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Civilization before and after
Christianity

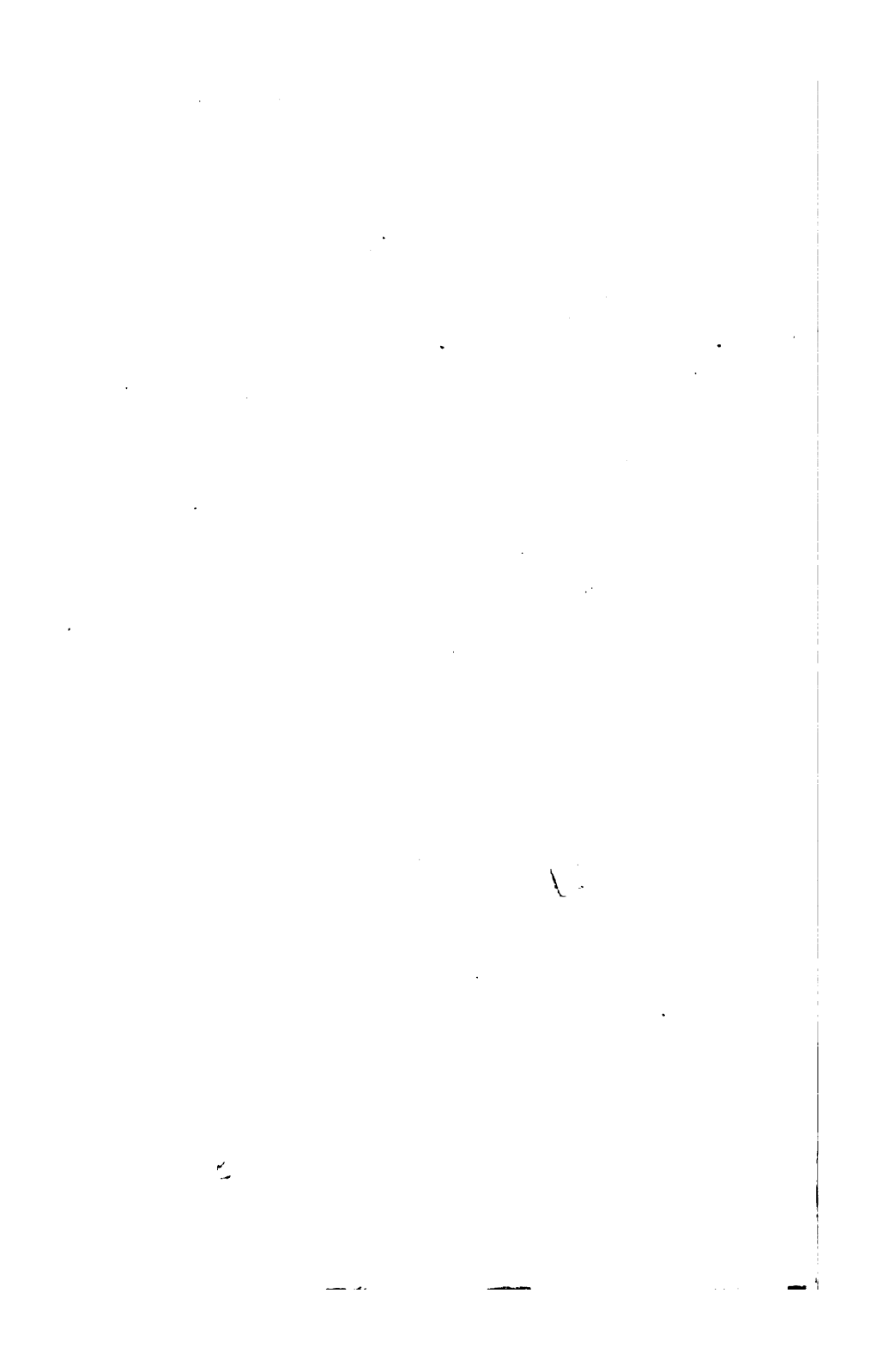
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Church, R. W.

CIVILIZATION

BEFORE AND AFTER CHRISTIANITY.

TWO LECTURES DELIVERED IN

ST. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL,

AT THE TUESDAY EVENING SERVICES,

January 23d & 30th, 1872.

BY
R. W. CHURCH, M.A.,

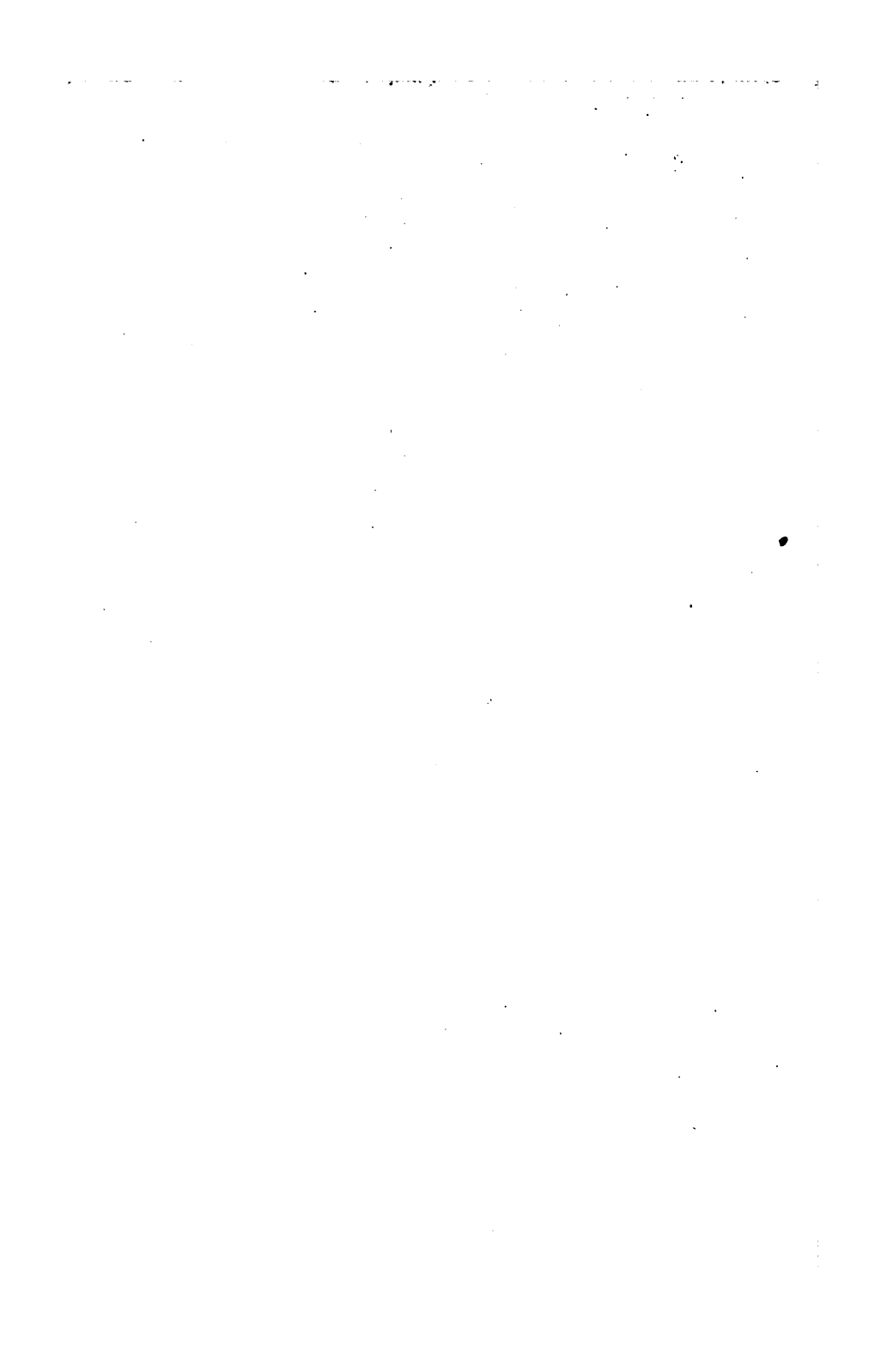
DEAN OF ST. PAUL'S.

London:

MACMILLAN & CO.

1872.

Price One Shilling.



CIVILIZATION

BEFORE AND AFTER CHRISTIANITY.

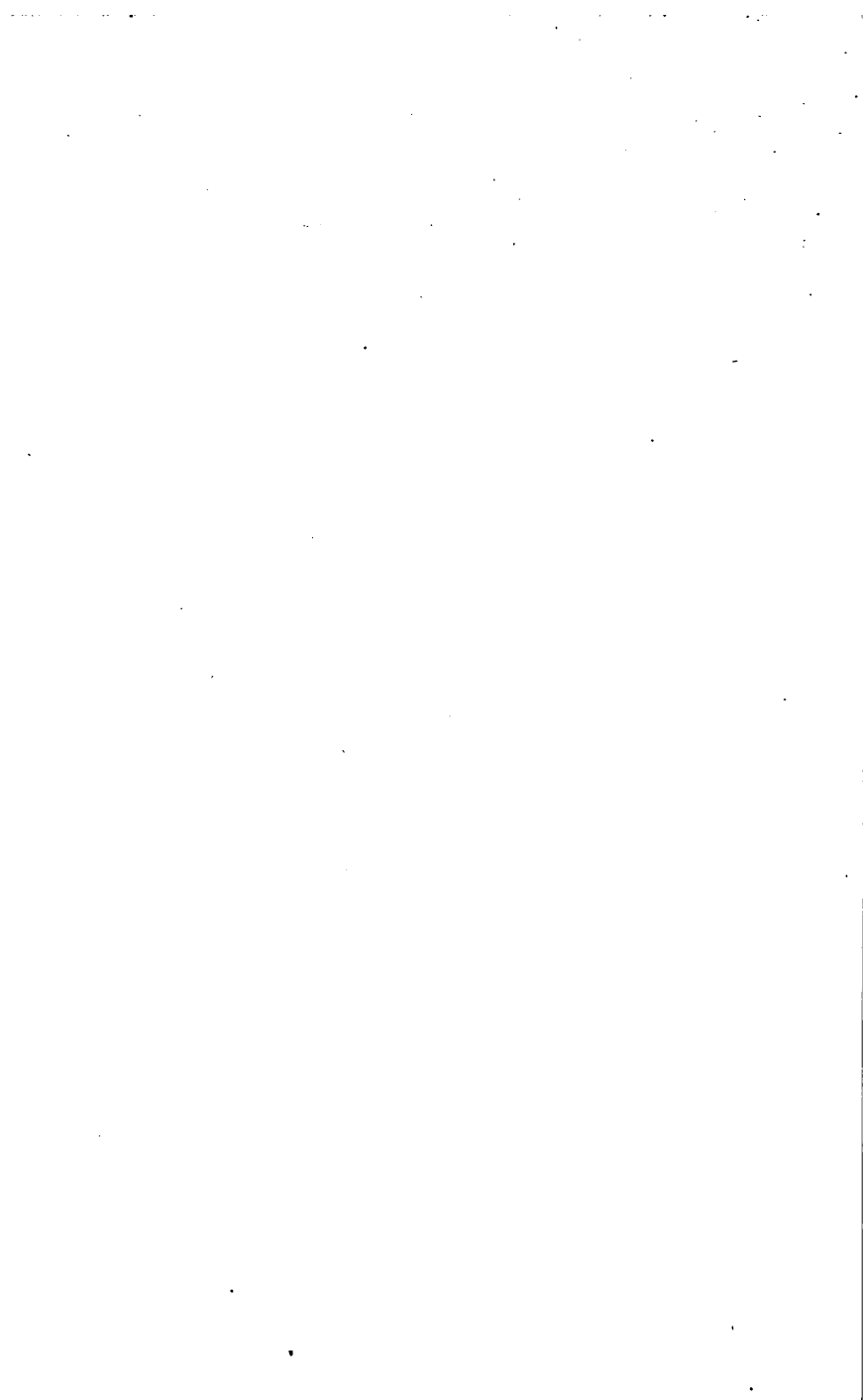
jects of interest and importance which are often assumed to be out of place in the pulpit. The first set was delivered by Mr. Gregory, in answer to the question, "Are we better than our Fathers?" and in them he considered the comparative distribution of wealth among different ranks of English society, now and in the seventeenth century, the relative positions of rich and poor, and the ties by which various classes of the community are bound together, at the two eras.* In the next course, Dr. Liddon examined the assumption, often boldly made, that Christianity is on the decline, in its political, intellectual, social, and moral aspects. The third was by Bishop Claughton, on the Ethics of Mahomedanism and Buddhism, as compared with the Ethics of Christianity. My interrupted set came next, and Professor Lightfoot was to have finished the series by some lectures on early Christian life. The attempt was thought by many

* Published by J. Parker & Co., Oxford and London.

an over-bold one. It certainly met with a cordial response from those for whom it was undertaken; and the lectures, which were intended to be given in a small side chapel, had to be delivered to large audiences under the dome. I have reprinted these two Lectures as a remembrance of an occasion of great interest to us at St. Paul's; I have no other justification for publishing them.

R. W. C.

February 1872.



LECTURE I.

ROMAN CIVILIZATION.

I PROPOSE to bring before your thoughts, in fulfilment of my part in this series of lectures, the subject of Civilization—first, as it was, in probably its highest form before Christian times, in the Roman State ; and next, as it has been since Christianity has influenced the course of history and the conditions of human life. In doing this, I have to remember several things. I have to remember the vastness of the field before us, the huge mass of materials, the number, difficulty, and importance of the questions which arise out of the subject, or hang on it. I have to remember that civilization is a thing of more or less, and that general statements about it are ever liable to be misunderstood or excepted to, because the speaker is thinking of

one phase or degree of it, and the listener and critic is thinking of another. One may have his thoughts full of its triumphs, and the other of its failures and shameful blots. I have to remember that it is a subject which has tasked the powers and filled the volumes of learned, able, and copious writers—Montesquieu, Guizot, Buckle, to name only these, who have made it their special theme—and that they have left much unsaid, much unsettled, about it. And I have to remember that I have only two short lectures—circumstances have made this necessary—to say what I can say about it. Perhaps for what I have to say it is enough. But, with such a subject, I should gladly have had more time both for preparation and for discourse.

We who pursue our business in this great city, we who come to hear or to worship in this great cathedral, have continually before our eyes, in some of its most striking and characteristic forms, a very complex but very distinctive fact in the

conditions of human existence—the vast complex fact to which we give the name of *civilization*. It is, we all know, a vague and elastic word, and I am not going to be so venturous as here to analyse it and define even its outlines: but it expresses a substantial idea, it marks a real difference in what men are and can be; and if loose and idle thinkers throw it about as if it was a glittering counter, it is so real, and so important in its meaning, that the most accurate ones cannot dispense with the use of it. The distinction between man in the barbarian state, and man in the state of civil life and civil society, is no imaginary one, though civilized life may be penetrated and disgraced with elements of barbarism, and gleams of civilization may be discerned far back in times which are rightly called barbarous. A cloudy sky and a bright sky are different things, though one may be brightening, and the other darkening, into its opposite; though there may be uncertainty about their

confines; though clouds may be prominent in the clear, and though there be light breaking through the dulness and gloom. Civilization is a sufficiently definite and a sufficiently interesting thing to speak about, even though we find, as we must if we think at all, how much of the subject eludes our grasp, and how idle it is, on an occasion like the present, to attempt to work upon it, except in the way of rough and imperfect sketching.

I include under the word *Civilization* all that man does, all that he discovers, all that he becomes, to fit himself most suitably for the life in which he finds himself here. It is obviously possible, for the fact stares us in the face, now as at all times, that this moral being, endowed with conscience and yearning after good, whom *we* believe to be here only in an early and most imperfect stage of his existence, may yet live, and feel, and act, as if all that he was made for was completed here. He may also, with the full assurance of immortality, yet see, in this

present state, a scene and stage of real life, in which that life is intended to be developed to the full perfection of which it is capable ;—a scene, intended, though temporary only, and only a training place, to call forth his serious and unsparing efforts after improvement ; just as at a school, in play-time as well as in work, we expect as much thought, as much purpose, as much effort, proportionate of course to the time, as we expect in grown-up life. There is, I need not say, a further question—whether this life *can* become all that it is capable of becoming, without reference to something beyond and above it : that, of course, is the question of questions of all ages, and emphatically of our own. But into that I am not now entering. All that I want to insist upon, is that there is such a thing as making this present life as perfect as it can be made for its own sake ; improving, inventing, adjusting, correcting, strictly examining into detail, sowing seeds and launching deeply-laid plans of policy, facing the present and

realizing the future, for the sake of what happens and must happen *in time*, under the known conditions of our experience here. To all such attempts to raise the level of human life, to all such endeavours to expand human capacity and elevate human character, to all that has in view the bettering of our social conditions, in all the manifold forms and diversified relations of the society in which we grow up and live, till our senses come to an end in death; to all that in the sphere, which is bounded to our eyes by the grave, tends to make life more beautiful, more reasonable, more pure, more rich both in achievement and felicity, up to the point when pain, and sorrow, and death claim their dread rights over it, and that, even in the presence of pain and death, imparts to life dignity, self-command, nobleness—to all this I should give the name of civilization.

I do not, therefore, take civilization to consist in the mere development, and extension, and perfection, either of the intellectual faculties, or

of the arts which minister to the uses and conveniences, or even the embellishment of life. The intellectual faculties, some of them at least, may be strong and keen in what I should still call a low stage of civilization, as hitherto in India. I cannot call the stage to which man has reached in Egypt, in China, or Japan, a high one, though there he has been singularly ingenious, singularly industrious, and in many ways eminently successful in bringing nature under his control. The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Italy were brilliant centuries: they witnessed a burst of genius in art, which was absolutely without its match. It *was* civilization, I cannot deny it. But I cannot call *that* other than a corrupt and base one, of which the theory was expounded, with infinite ability, by Macchiavelli, and the history told by Guicciardini. I do not call it a true civilization, where men do not attempt to discharge their duties *as men* in society. Not even the presence of Leonardo, Michael Angelo, and Raffaello can persuade me to

rank it high, as a form of civilization, in which life, amid all its splendours, was so precarious and so misguided, in which all the relations and rights of society were so frightfully confused, and in which the powers of government were systematically carried on by unlimited perfidy, by the poison bowl and the dagger. I should not consent to call the railway, or the telegraph, or even the newspaper of our own age, a final test of civilization till I knew better how the facilities of intercourse were employed,—what was flashed along the wires or written in the columns ; nor, again, the wonderful and intricate machinery of our manufactures and trade, till I knew how the wealth produced by it was used. Civilization, the form, as perfect as man can make it, of his life here, needs these appliances, welcomes them, multiplies them ; man needs all the powers that he can get for help for remedy, for the elevation of his state. But the true subject of civilization is the *man himself*, and not the circumstances, the instruments, the

inventions round him. "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." The degree of civilization in a society, high or low, rising or going back, depends, it seems to me, on the actual facts of civil life, political, social, domestic, not on the machinery of outward things of which men can dispose; on what men try to be one to another; on what they try to make *of themselves*, not of their goods and powers; on the words which they speak, really speak from their hearts, not imitate or feign; on the indications of will and purpose, of habits of life, of self-government or indulgence—in a word, *of character*. The degree of civilization depends a great deal more on whether they are manly, honest, just, public-spirited, generous, able to work together in life, than on whether they are rich, or hard working, or cunning of hand, or subtle of thought, or delicate of taste, or keen searchers into nature and discoverers of its secrets. All these things are sure to belong to civilization as it

advances; and as it advances it needs them, and can turn them to account, more and more. All I say is, that they are not civilization itself, as I understand it.

Our own civilization, it is not denied, has been greatly influenced by religion, and by the Christian religion; by the close connection of this present life with a life beyond it, and by what Christianity teaches of our relations to the unseen. But civil life of a high character has undoubtedly existed at any rate, for a time, without such connection. I will venture this evening to put before you the hasty sketch of such a civilization, and follow it to its fate.

In the ancient world, as we call it, two great forms of civilization appear, with which we must always have the liveliest sympathy. They have deeply influenced our own: and we must become quite other men from what we are when we forget them. The civilization of Greece, with Athens for its standard, and in a main degree its source, still

lives in our civil and political, as well as in our intellectual life. The great idea of citizenship, with all that flows from it of duty and ennobling service and cherished ties, found there its clear and complete expression in real fact and spontaneous action, before it was portrayed and analysed by writers of extraordinary force and subtlety, and of matchless eloquence, who are our masters still. But the civilization of Athens, though not too precocious for its place in the world's history, was too precocious for its own chance of life. On that little stage, and surrounded by the ambitions and fierce energies of a world of conquest,—in its first moment of weakness and mistake, it was oppressed and crushed. It lasted long enough to plant a new conception of human society among men, to disengage and start upon its road a new and inextinguishable power, destined to pursue its way with the most momentous results, through all the times to come. It did not last long enough to work out in any proportionate way a history for itself.

It is to civilization as exhibited in the Roman State that I invite your attention. There you have the power of growth, of change, and yet of stability and persistent endurance. There you have an ideal of social and civil life, a complex and not always a consistent one, yet in its central elements very strongly defined ; keeping its hold on a great people with singular tenacity through the centuries, amid all their varying fortunes ; undergoing great transformations in the vicissitudes of good and evil days, yet at the bottom unchanged, and frequently re-asserting its unimpaired vitality at moments when we least expect it. It grew to impress itself on mankind as the power which had a unique right to command their obedience and to order their affairs ; it made its possessors, and it made the nations round, feel that Romans were, in a very real sense, the "Lords of the human race." To our eyes, as we look back upon it, it represents, as nothing else does, the civilization of the *then* world.

Why does it deserve this character ? What in it

specially has a claim on our interest? The Romans, we know, left their mark on the world; much of what they did is still with us, defying all our centuries of change. We live in the cities which they founded: here, at St. Paul's, one of their great roads runs past our doors. But I do not dwell on Roman civilization, because they were builders who built as if with the infinite idea of the future before them; because they covered the face of the earth with famous and enduring cities; because their engineers excavated harbours, drained marshes, and brought the waters of the hills along miles of stupendous aqueducts; because they bound together their empire with a network of roads and postal services; because they were the masters of organized and scientific war; because they were great colonial administrators, subduing the earth, to subdue its rudeness, and plant in it the arts of life. Not for all this; but because, in spite of the crimes, which come back to our minds when we name the Romans, they were yet keenly alive to what men, as men, ought to be,—

men, as men, not for what they had, but for what they were—not as rich, or clever, or high in dignity, or even as wielding power, but as citizens of a great commonwealth and city, the Mother and Lady of them all. Not because they possessed in large measure the arts and the expedients by which the social machine is made to move more easily, much less for the pride and sensuality which squandered these arts in ostentation and fabulous luxury ; but because, amid all the dark tragedies which fill their history, in spite of the matchless perfidy and the matchless cruelty which contradicted their own ideals, and seem to silence us when we talk of Roman virtue, it is yet true that deep in the minds of the most faithless, the most selfish, the most ruthless, was the knowledge that justice and public spirit were things to which a Roman, by the nobility of his birth, was obliged ; because the traditional, accepted popular morality of Rome placed among its first articles, however they were violated in practice, that fortitude, honesty, devotion, energy

in service, were essential things in a society of men ; because popular opinion, loose as the term may be, had the sentiment of honour, and owned the bond of duty, even to death ; because Romans recognized a serious use of life, in *doing*, and doing for the common weal—not merely in learning, or acquiring, or enjoying for themselves alone.

Now, immediately that I have said all this, the picture of Roman history rises up before our thoughts, as it is painted in Gibbon, or Milman, or Merivale. We remember the hard and rapacious times of the Republic, with their resolute and unflinching vindictiveness, their insolent affectations and hypocrisies of moderation and right. We are met by the enormous corruption and monstrous profligacy of the statesmen of the age of transition ; and under the Empire we find a system fruitful, normally fruitful, of a succession of beings, the most degraded, the most detestable, the most horrible, of all that ever bore the name of man. Is it worth while to talk

in Christian days of a civilization with such fruits as these?

I venture to submit that it is—that the subject is most interesting and instructive, and that it is our own fault if, in spite of the evil, we are not taught and braced by so much that is strong and so much that is noble. We pass backwards and forwards from admiration to horror and disgust as we read the story in Gibbon, who, in his taste for majesty and pomp, his moral unscrupulousness, and his scepticism, reflected the genius of the Empire of which he recounted the fortunes; but who in his genuine admiration of public spirit and duty, and in his general inclination to be just to all, except only to the Christian name, reflects another and better side of Roman character. For there *was* this better side. Roman civilization produced not only *great* men, but *good* men of high stamp and mark; men with great and high views of human life, and human responsibility,—with a high standard of what men ought to aim at,

with a high belief of what they could do. And it not only produced individuals ; it produced a strong and permanent force of sentiment ; it produced a character shared very unequally among the people, but powerful enough to determine the course of history, in the way which suited it. I think it may be said with truth that the high ideal of Roman civilization explains its final and complete collapse. A people with a high standard, acted on by the best, recognized by all, cannot be untrue to the standard with impunity ; it not only falls, but falls to a depth proportionate to the height which it once was seeking ; it is stricken with the penalty which follows on hollow words and untrue feelings,—on the desertion of light and a high purpose, on the contradiction between law and life. A civilization like that of China, undisturbed by romantic views of man's nature, and content with a low estimate of his life, may flow on, like one of its great rivers, steady, powerful, useful ; unchanged for

centuries, and unagitated by that which, more than wars and ambition, is the breaker up of societies,—the power of new ideas, of new hopes and aims. But because Roman civilization became false to its principles, there was no reversing its doom.

The reason why I put Roman civilization so high and in so unique a place is, that it grew out of and cherished, age after age, with singular distinctiveness and tenacity, two great principles. One of these was that the work of the community should be governed by law; the other, that public interest and public claims were paramount to all others.

Where you have in a society a strong and lasting tendency to bring public and private affairs under the control of fixed general rules, to which individual wills are expected and are trained to submit; where these rules are found to be grounded, instinctively perhaps at first, methodically afterwards, on definite principles of right, fitness, and sound reason;—where people's habitual impulse

and natural disposition is to believe in laws, and to trust them, and it is accepted as the part of common sense, duty, and honour to obey them:—where these characteristics, of respect for law as an authority, of resort to it as an expedient and remedy, are found to follow the progress of a great national history even from its beginnings, it cannot be denied that there you have an essential feature of high civilization. They, of whom this may be said, have seen truly, in one most important point, how to order human life. And Law, in that sense in which we know it, and are living under it, in its strength, in its majesty, in its stability, in its practical, business-like character, may, I suppose, be said to have been born at Rome. And it was born very early ; very different, of course, in its rude beginnings, from what it grew to be afterwards, but showing, from the first, the serious, resolute struggles of the community to escape from the mischiefs of self-will and random living, without understood order and accepted rules. The political

conflicts of which Roman history is full, centred, in its best days at least, round laws : they assumed a state of law, they attempted to change it ;—the result, if result there was, was expressed in a law : violent and extreme measures might be resorted to, and not seldom, in those fierce days, something worse ; but it was presupposed by public opinion, whatever violent men might dare, that law was to continue and to be obeyed, till it was changed, and that it would only be changed by lawful authority and by lawful processes. Roman law was no collection of a certain number of vague constitutional articles ; it was no cast-iron code of unchanging rules : but it was a real, living, expansive system, developing vigorously as the nation grew, co-extensive with the nation's wants in its range and applicability, searching and self-enforcing in its work, a system which the people used and relied upon in their private as much as in their public affairs. And so grew up, slowly and naturally, through many centuries, in the way familiar to us

in our law, the imposing and elaborate system of scientific jurisprudence, which the Romans, when they passed away, bequeathed to the coming world : the great collections of Theodosius and Justinian, in which are gathered the experiences of many ages of Roman society, played upon, illuminated, analysed, arranged, by a succession of judicial intellects of vast power and consummate accomplishment : that as yet unequalled monument of legal learning, comprehensive method, and fruitfulness in practical utility, which, under the name of Civil Law, has been the great example to the world of what law may be, which has governed the jurisprudence of great part of Europe, which has influenced in no slight degree our own jealous and hostile English traditions, and will probably influence them still more. "The education of the world in the principles of a sound jurisprudence," says Dean Merivale, "was the most wonderful work of the Roman conquerors. It was complete ; it was universal : and in permanence it has far out-

lasted, at least in its distinct results, the duration of the Empire itself." A civilization which, without precedent and unaided, out of its own resources and contact with life, produced such a proof of its idea and estimate of law, must, whatever be its defects, be placed very high.

Again, when, with this strong and clear and permanent sense of law, you also have in a society, among its best men a strong force of public spirit, and among all a recognition that in this the best reflect the temper and expectations of the whole, its civilization has reached a high level. It is the civilization of those who have discerned very distinctly the great object and leading obligation of man's fellowship in a state—of his life as a citizen. And certainly in no people which the world has ever seen has the sense of public duty been keener and stronger than in Rome, or lived on with unimpaired vitality through great changes for a longer time. Amid the accumulation of repulsive and dark elements in Roman

character, amid the harshness and pride and ferocity, often joined with lower vices, meanness, perfidy, greed, sensuality, there is one that again and again extorts a respect that even courage and high ability cannot,—a high, undeniable public spirit. Not always disinterested, any more than in some great men in our own history, but without question for all that, thoroughly and seriously genuine. It was a tradition of the race. Its early legends dwelt upon the strange and terrible sacrifices which this supreme loyalty to the commonwealth had exacted, and obtained without a murmur, from her sons. They told of a magistrate and a father, the founder of Roman freedom, dooming his two young sons to the axe for having tampered with conspiracy against the State ; of great men, resigning high office because they bore a dangerous name, or pulling down their own houses because too great for citizens ; of soldiers to whose death fate had bound victory, solemnly devoting themselves to die, or leaping into the

gulf which would only close on a living victim ; of a great family purchasing peace in civil troubles by leaving the city, and turning their energy into a foreign war, in which they perished ; of the captive general who advised his countrymen to send him back to certain torture and death, rather than grant the terms he was commissioned to propose as the price of his release. Whatever we may think of these stories, they show what was in the mind of those who told and repeated them : and they continued to be the accredited types and models of Roman conduct throughout Roman history. Even in its bad days, even at its close, the temper was there, the sense of public interest, the fire of public duty, the public spirit which accepted without complaint, trouble and sacrifice. It produced, at a time when hope seemed gone, a succession of noble and high-souled rulers, whose government gave for a moment the fallacious promise of happiness to the world. It produced a race of now nameless and

unremembered men, who, while they probably forgot many other duties, forgot not their duty to the public, of which they were the servants.

“The history of the Cæsars,” writes Dean Merivale, “presents to us a constant succession of brave, patient, resolute, and faithful soldiers, men deeply impressed with a sense of duty, superior to vanity, despisers of boasting, content to toil in obscurity, and shed their blood at the frontiers of the Empire, unrepining at the cold mistrust of their masters, not clamorous for the honours so sparingly awarded to them, but satisfied with the daily work of their hands, and full of faith in the national destiny which they were daily accomplishing. If such humble instruments of society are not to be compared, for the importance of their mission, with the votaries of speculative wisdom, who protested in their lives and in their deaths against the crimes of their generation, there is still something touching in the simple heroism of these chiefs of the legions. . . . Here

are virtues not to be named indeed with the zeal of missionaries and the devotion of martyrs, but worthy nevertheless of a high place in the esteem of all who reverence human nature."

For these reasons, and more might be added—among them, the real reverence with which these fierce and successful soldiers regarded the arts, the pursuits, the dress of peace, and readily and willingly returned to them,—we may look back to the civilization of Rome with an interest which we might not give to its buildings, its wealth, or its organization of empire. It was a signal and impressive proof of what men might rise to be; of the height, too, to which the spirit of a nation might rise. The world is not rich enough in greatness to afford to forget men who, with so much that was evil and hateful about them, yet made the idea of law a common thing, and impressed on the world so memorably the obligations of public duty and the sanctions of a public trust.

How did such a civilization come to nought? It is wonderful that it should have arisen; but it is more wonderful that, having arisen, it should have failed to sustain itself. How did a civilization so robust, aiming at and creating, not the ornamental and the pleasurable, but the solid and laborious, a character so serious and manly, austere simple and energetic in men, pure and noble in women—how did it fail and perish? What was the root of bitterness which sprung up amid its strength, and brought it, through the most horrible epochs the world ever saw, of terror and tyranny, and the foulest and most insane licentiousness—epochs which St. Paul's words in his Epistle to the Romans are hardly strong enough to describe—to the most absolute and ignoble ruin? Of course there was evil mixed with it from the first; but evil is mixed with all human things, and evil was mixed to the full with the life and institutions out of which the best days of Christian civilization have come,

whether you put these days in what are called the ages of Faith, or the age of the Reformation, or the ages of civil liberty. Pride and selfish greed, hypocrisy, corruption, profligacy, fraud, cruelty, have been as abundant in the centuries after Christ as they were in those before. But the civilization of Europe is not ruined, in spite of its immense dangers; I see no reason to think that it will be;—why was that of Rome?

To answer this question duly would be to go through the Roman history. I must content myself with one general statement. Roman civilization was only great as long as men were true to their principles; but it had no root beyond their personal characters and traditions and customary life; and when these failed, it had nothing else to appeal to—it had no power and spring of recovery. These traditions, these customs of life, this inherited character, did keep up a stout and prolonged struggle against the shocks of changed circumstances, against the restless and unscrupu-

lous cravings of individual selfishness. But they played a losing game. Each shock, each fresh blow, found them weaker after the last ; and no favouring respite was allowed them to regain and fortify the strength they had lost. The high instincts of the race wore out : bad men had nothing to do but to deny that these instincts were theirs. The powers of evil and of darkness mounted higher and higher, turning great professions into audacious hypocrisies, great institutions into lifeless and mischievous forms, great principles into absurd self-contradictions. Had there been anything to fall back upon, there were often men to do it ; but what was there, but the memories and examples of past greatness ? Religion had once played a great part in what had given elevation to Roman civil life. It had had much to do with law, with political development, with Roman sense of public duty and Roman reverence for the State. But, of course, a religion of farmers and yeomen, a

religion of clannish etiquettes and family pride and ancestral jealousies, could not long stand the competition of the Eastern faiths, or the scepticism of the cultivated classes. It went; and there was nothing to supply its place but a Philosophy, often very noble and true in its language, able, I doubt not, in evil days to elevate, and comfort, and often purify its better disciples—but unable to overawe, to heal, to charm a diseased society: which never could breathe life and energy into words for the people: which wanted that voice of power which could quicken the dead letter, and command attention, where the destinies of the world were decided. I know nothing more strange and sorrowful in Roman history than to observe the absolute impotence of what must have been popular conscience, on the crimes of statesmen and the bestial infamy of Emperors. There were plenty of men to revile them; there were men to brand them in immortal epigrams; there were men to kill. But there

was no man to make his voice heard and be respected, about righteousness, and temperance, and judgment to come.

And so Roman civilization fell ;—fell, before even the eager troops of barbarians rushed in among its wrecks ;—fell because it had no salt in it, no wholesome and reviving leaven, no power of recovery. Society could not bear its own greatness, its own immense possessions and powers, its own success and achievements. It fell, and great was the fall thereof. The world had never seen anything like Rome and its civilization. It seemed the finish and perfection of all things, beyond which human prospects could not go. The citizens and statesmen who were proud of it, the peoples who reposed under its shadow, the early Christians who hated it as the rival of the Kingdom of God, the men of the Middle Ages who looked on it as the earthly counterpart and bulwark of that kingdom, and insisted on believing that it was still alive in the world,—Augustine who contrasted it with the city of God,

Dante who trusted in it as God's predestined minister of truth and righteousness where the Church had failed,—all looked on it as something so consummate and unique in its kind, that nothing could be conceived or hoped for which could take its place. Before the tremendous destructions in which it perished the lights of man's heaven, of all human society, seemed to disappear. Cicero had likened the overthrow and extinction of a city and polity, once created among men, to the ruin and passing away of the solid earth. When the elder civilization of Rome went to pieces, rotten within and battered by the storms without, it was a portent and calamity which the human imagination had almost refused to believe possible. It was indeed the foundering of a world.

How this lost civilization was recovered, renewed, and filled with fresh and hopeful life, we may try to see in the next lecture.

LECTURE II.

CIVILIZATION AFTER CHRISTIANITY.

THE failure of Roman civilization, its wreck and dissolution in the barbarian storms, was the most astonishing catastrophe the world had yet seen in its history; and those who beheld the empire breaking up, as blow after blow was struck more home, ceased to look forward to any future for society. In this strange collapse of the strongest, in this incredible and inconceivable shaking of the foundations of what was assumed to be eternal, the end seemed come; and as no one could imagine a new and different order, men thought it useless to hope anything more for the world. It is not wonderful,—but they were too despairing. It is not wonderful,—for they had no example

within their knowledge of the great lights of human life, which seemed destined to shine for ever, being violently extinguished, and then being rekindled, and conquering once more in heightened splendour the gloom and confusion. They had seen empires perish, but never before the defeat of a matchless structure of law and administration without example in history, which was to provide security for empire. But they were too despairing. They thought too little of new powers and principles new in the world, to which many of them trusted much, both in life and in death, but of which no one then living knew the strength or suspected the working. They guessed not how that while the barbarian deluge was wasting and sweeping away the works of men, God was pouring new life into the world. They guessed not that in that Gospel, which consoled so many of them in the miseries of this sinful world, which to so many seemed but one superstition the more, to which so many traced all their disasters, there lay the seeds of a social and

civil revival, compared with which the familiar refinement and extolled civilization of Rome would one day come to seem little better than an instance of the rudeness of antiquity.

The decay and fall of the old Roman civilization, and the growth out of its ruins of a new one, infinitely more vigorous and elastic, steady in its long course, patient of defeat and delay, but with century after century witnessing, on one point or another, to its unrelaxed advance,—the giving way of one great system and the replacing it by another,—form a great historical phenomenon, as vast as it is unique and without parallel, and to practical people not less full of warning than it is of hope.

Let us cast a hasty glance upon it,—it can be but a most hasty and superficial one. What was the change, what was the new force, or element, or aspect of the world, or assemblage of ideas, which proved able to make of society what Roman loftiness of heart, Roman sagacity, Roman patience,

Roman strength had failed to make of it? What power was it which took up the discredited and hopeless work, and, infusing new energies and new hopes into men, has made the long history of the Western nations different in kind from any other period of the history of mankind; different in this, that though its march has been often very dark and very weary, often arrested and often retarded, chequered with terrible reverses, and stained by the most flagrant crimes, it has never been, definitely and for good, beaten back; the movement, as we can see when we review it, has been on the whole a uniform one, and has ever been tending onwards; it has never surrendered, and has never had reason to surrender, the hope of improvement, even though improvement might be remote and difficult.

We are told sometimes that it was the power of race, of the new nations which came on the scene: and I do not deny it. But the power of race seems like the special powers of a particular soil, in which certain seeds germinate and thrive

with exceptional vigour, but for which you must have the seed, and sow it, before the soil will display its properties. It is very important, but it is not enough to say that Teutons took the place of Latins; indeed, it is not wholly true. But what planted among Teutons and Latins the seeds and possibilities of a renewed civilization was the power of a new morality. It is a matter of historical fact, that in the closing days of Rome an entirely new set of moral ideas and moral purposes, of deep significance, fruitful in consequences, and of a strength and intensity unknown before, were making their way in society, and establishing themselves in it. It is to the awakening of this new morality, which has never perished out of the hearts of men from that day to this, that the efforts and the successes of modern civilization are mainly due; it is on the permanence of these moral convictions that it rests. What the origin and root of this morality really are, you will not suppose that in this place I

affect to make a question ; but the matter I am now dwelling on is the morality itself, not on its connection with the Christian creed. And it is as clear and certain a fact of history that the coming in of Christianity was accompanied by new moral elements in society, inextinguishable, widely operative, never destroyed, though apparently at times crushed and paralysed,—as it is certain that Christian nations have made on the whole more progress in the wise ordering of human life than was made in the most advanced civilization of the times before Christianity.

Roman belief in right and law had ended in scepticism, whether there was such a thing as goodness and virtue : Roman public spirit had given place, under the disheartening impression of continual mistakes and disappointments, to a selfish indifference to public scandals and public mischiefs. The great principles of human action were hopelessly confused : enthusiasm for them was dead. This made vain the efforts of rulers

like Trajan and the Antonines, of scientific legislators like Justinian, of heroes like Belisarius: they could not save a society in which, with so much outward show, the moral tone was so fatally decayed and enfeebled. But over this dreary waste of helplessness and despondency, over these mud-banks and shallows, the tide was coming in and mounting. Slowly, variably, in imperceptible pulsations, or in strange, wild rushes, the great wave was flowing. There had come into the world an enthusiasm, popular, wide-spread, serious, of a new kind; not for conquest, or knowledge, or riches, but for real, solid goodness. It seems to me that the exultation apparent in early Christian literature, beginning with the Apostolic Epistles, at the prospect now at length disclosed within the bounds of a sober hope, of a great moral revolution in human life,—that the rapturous confidence which pervades these Christian ages, that at last the routine of vice and sin has met its match, that a new and astonishing possibility has

come within view, that men, not here and there, but on a large scale, might attain to that hitherto hopeless thing to the multitudes, goodness,—is one of the most singular and solemn things in history. The enthusiasm of the Crusades, the enthusiasm of Puritanism, the enthusiasm of the Jacobins—of course, I am speaking only of strength and depth of feeling—were not its equal. We can, I suppose, have but a dim idea of the strange and ravishing novelty with which the appearance of Divine and unearthly Goodness, in real human form, burst upon eyes accustomed, as to an order of nature, to the unbroken monotony of deepening debasement, wearied out with the unchanging spectacle of irremediable sin. The visitation and presence of that High Goodness, making Himself like men, calling men to be like Him, had altered the possibilities of human nature; it was mirrored more or less perfectly in a thousand lives; it had broken the spell and custom of evil which seemed to bind human society; it had brought goodness,

real, inward, energetic goodness of the soul within the reach of those who seemed most beyond it—the crowds, the dregs, the lost. That well-known world, the scene of man's triumphs and his untold sorrows, but not of his goodness, was really a place where righteousness and love and purity should have a visible seat and home, and might wield the power which sin had wielded over the purposes and wills of men. To men on whom this great surprise had come, who were in the vortex of this great change, all things looked new. Apart from the infinite seriousness given to human life by the cross of Christ, from the infinite value and dignity given to it by the revelation of resurrection and immortality, an awful rejoicing transport filled their souls, as they saw that there was the chance,—more than the chance,—the plain fore-running signs, of human nature becoming here, what none had ever dared it would become, morally better. When they speak of this new thing in the earth, the proved reality of conversion from sin to

righteousness, of the fruits of repentance, of the supplanting of vice by yet mightier influences of purity, of the opening and boundless prospects of moral improvement and elevation,—their hearts swell, their tone is exalted, their accent becomes passionate and strong. It was surely the noblest enthusiasm—if it was but rooted in lasting and trustworthy influences—which the world had ever seen. It was no wonder that this supreme interest eclipsed all other interests. It is no wonder that for this glorious faith men gladly died.

This second spring-tide of the world, this fresh start of mankind in the career of their eventful destiny, was the beginning of many things: but what I observe on now is that it was the beginning of new chances, new impulses, and new guarantees for civilized life, in the truest and worthiest sense of the words. It was this, by bringing into society a morality which was serious and powerful, and a morality which would wear and last; one which could stand the shocks of human passion,

the desolating spectacle of successful wickedness, the insidious waste of unconscious degeneracy,—one which could go back to its sacred springs and repair its fire and its strength. Such a morality, as Roman greatness was passing away, took possession of the ground. Its beginnings were scarcely felt, scarcely known of, in the vast movement of affairs in the greatest of empires. By and by, its presence, strangely austere, strangely gentle, strangely tender, strangely inflexible, began to be noticed. But its work was long only a work of indirect preparation. Those whom it charmed, those whom it opposed, those whom it tamed, knew not what was being done for the generations which were to follow them. They knew not, while they heard of the household of God, and the universal brotherhood of man, that the most ancient and most familiar institution of their society, one without which they could not conceive its going on,—slavery,—was receiving the fatal wound of which, though late, too late, it was at last to die. They

knew not, when they were touched by the new teaching about forgiveness and mercy, that a new value was being insensibly set on human life, new care and sympathy planted in society for human suffering, a new horror awakened at human bloodshed. They knew not, while they looked on men dying, not for glory or even country, but for convictions and an invisible truth, that a new idea was springing up of the sacredness of conscience, a new reverence beginning for veracity and faithfulness. They knew not that a new measure was being established of the comparative value of riches and all earthly things, while they saw, sometimes with amazement, sometimes with inconsiderate imitativeness, the numbers who gave up the world, and all that was best as well as worst in it, for love of the eternal heritage—in order to keep themselves pure. They knew not of the great foundations laid for public duty and public spirit, in the obligations of Christian membership, in the responsibilities of the Christian clergy, in

the never-forgotten example of One whose life had been a perpetual service, and who had laid it down as the most obvious of claims, for those to whom He had bound Himself. They little thought of what was in store for civil and secular society, as they beheld a number of humble men, many of them foreigners, plying their novel trade of preachers and missionaries, announcing an eternal kingdom of righteousness, welcoming the slave and the outcast as a brother,—a brother of the Highest,—offering hope and change to the degraded sinner, stammering of Christ and redemption to the wild barbarian, worshipping in the catacombs, and meekly burying their dead, perhaps their wronged and murdered dead, in the sure hope of everlasting peace. Slowly, obscurely, imperfectly, most imperfectly, these seeds of blessing for society began to ripen, to take shape, to gain power. The time was still dark and wintry and tempestuous, and the night was long in going. It is hard even now to discern there the promise

of what our eyes have seen. I suppose it was impossible then. It rather seemed as if the world was driving rapidly to its end, not that it was on the eve of its most amazing and hopeful transformation. But in that unhappy and desponding and unhonoured time, borne in the bosom of that institution and society which the world knew and knows as the Christian Church, there were present the necessary and manifold conditions of the most forward civilization ; of its noblest features, of its substantial good, of its justice, its order, its humanity, its hopefulness, its zeal for improvement :—

“ There is a day in spring
When under all the earth the secret germs
Begin to stir and glow before they bud.
The wealth and festal pomps of midsummer
Lie in the heart of that inglorious hour
Which no man names with blessing, though its work
Is blessed by all the world. Such days there are
In the slow story of the growth of souls.”¹

And such a day there was in the “slow story”

¹ Story of Queen Isabel. By Miss Smedley.

of the improvement and progress of civilized Christendom.

The point I wish to insist on is, that with Christianity, as long as there is Christianity, there comes a moral spring and vitality and force, a part and consequence of its influence, which did not and could not exist before it. You cannot conceive of Christianity except as a moral religion, requiring, inspiring morality; and it was just this spring, this force of morality, which was wanting, and which could not be, in Roman civilization. Morality there was, often in a high degree: but it came and went with men or with generations, and there was nothing to keep it alive, nothing to rekindle it when extinct, nothing to suggest and nourish its steady improvement. At any rate there was not enough, if, when we remember the influence of great examples and great writers, it is too sweeping to say there was nothing. But with Christianity the condition was changed. I am sure I am not unmindful of what

shortcomings, what shames and sins, what dark infamies, blot the history of Christian society. I do not forget that Christian morality has been a thing of degrees and impulses, rising and falling ; that it has been at times impracticably extreme, and at times scandalously lax ; that there have been periods when it seemed lost : that in some of its best days it has been unaccountably blind and perversely stupid and powerless, conniving at gross and undeniable inconsistencies, condoning flagrant wrong. This is true. Yet look through all the centuries since it appeared, and see if ever, in the worst and darkest of them, it was not *there*, as it never was in Rome, for hope, if not for present help and remedy. There was an undying voice, even if it came from the lips of hypocrites, which witnessed perpetually of mercy, justice, and peace. There was a seriousness given to human life, by a death everywhere died in the prospect of the judgment. I am putting things at the worst. Christian morality lived even in the

tenth century ; even in the times of the Borgias and Medici. The wicked passed—the wicked age, the wicked men ; passed, with the evil they had done, with the good which they had frustrated, with the righteous whom they had silenced or slain. And when they were gone, “when the tyranny was overpast,” the unforgotten law of right, the inextinguishable power of conscience, were found to have survived unweakened through the hour of darkness, ready to reassert and to extend their empire. Great as have been the disasters and failures of Christian society, I think we have not yet seen the kind of hopeless collapse in which Roman civilization ended. Feeble and poor as the spring of morality might be in this or that people, there has hitherto been something to appeal to, and to hope from, which was not to be found in the days of the Antonines, the most peaceful and felicitous of Roman times.

In this great restoration of civilization, which is due mainly to the impulse and the power of

Christian morality, a great place must be given to the *direct* influence of Christian aspects of life and ideas of duty. Christian ideas of purity acted directly on all that was connected with family and domestic life. They forbade, with intense and terrible severity, before which even passion quailed, the frightful liberty in the relations of the sexes which in Greece, and at last in Rome, had been thought so natural. Here was one great point fixed : the purification of the home, the sanctity thrown round the wife and the mother, the rescuing of the unmarried from the assumed licence of nature, the protection given to the honour of the female slave and then of the female servant, were social victories well worth the unrelenting and often extravagant asceticism which was, perhaps, their inevitable price at first. They were the immediate effects of a belief in the Sermon on the Mount; and where that belief was held, they would more or less consistently follow. So with the fiercer tempers and

habits of men: against cruelty, against high-handed oppression and abuse of strength, there was a constant, unyielding protest in the Christian law of justice and charity, continually unheeded, never unfelt: even war and vengeance were uneasy under the unceasing though unavailing rebuke of the Gospel law, and made concessions to it, though too strong, too fatally necessary, to submit to it. Further, under the influence of Christian morality, later civilization showed a power of appropriating and assimilating all that was noble and salutary in its older forms. It appropriated the Roman idea of law, and gave it a larger and more equitable scope, and a more definite consecration to the ends of justice and the common good. It invested the ancient idea of citizenship and patriotism with simpler and more generous feelings, and with yet holier sanctions. It accepted from the ancient thinkers their philosophic temper and open spirit of inquiry, and listened reverentially to their lessons of wisdom. It reinforced the Roman idea, a

confused and inconsistent though a growing one, of the unity of the human race; and though the victory over custom and appearances is hardly yet won, the tendency to recognize that unity can never fail, while the belief prevails that Christ died for the world. And once more, it is not easy to say what Christian belief, Christian life, Christian literature have done to make the greatest thoughts of the ancient world "come home to men's business and bosoms." No one can read the wonderful sayings of Seneca, Epictetus, or Marcus Aurelius, without being impressed, abashed perhaps, by their grandeur. No one can read them without wondering the next moment why they fell so dead—how little response they seem to have awakened round them. What was *then* but the word of the solitary thinker has now become the possession, if they will, of the multitude. The letter of great maxims has been filled with a vivifying spirit. Their truths have been quickened into new meaning by the new morality in which they have found

a place, by the more general and keener conscience which has owned them.

The direct effects of Christian morality on modern civilization would be allowed by most people to be manifest and great. I wish to call attention to one or two points of its indirect influence. Civilization, the ordering with the utmost attainable success, of civil and secular life, is one thing; and Christian religion is another. They are two currents, meeting from time to time, inosculating, sometimes confused, at other times divergent and possibly flowing different ways: but, anyhow, they are two currents. Take such a picture of real daily human interests and human activity as is presented to us in so wonderful, so overwhelming, though so familiar a shape, in the columns, and quite as much in the advertisements, of a great newspaper; or again, when we thread the streets and crowds of a great city, and try to imagine the infinite aims and divisions of its business. There is the domain of civilization, its works,

its triumphs, its failures and blots : and its main scope is *this* life, whatever be the affinities and relations, by which it has to do with what concerns man's other life. But the point that seems to me worth notice is this: the way in which the Christian current of thought, of aim, of conscience, of life, has affected the other current, even where separated and remote from it. We are told that the presence of electrical force in one body induces a corresponding force in another not in contact with the first, but adjacent to it; that one set of forces is raised to greater than their normal power and intensity by the neighbourhood of another; that currents passing in a given direction communicate, as long as they continue, new properties to a body round which they circulate: the neutral iron becomes a magnet, attracting, vibrating, able to hold up weights, as long as it is encircled by a galvanic circuit, which does not touch or traverse it. So the presence of Christian forces acted, by a remote and indirect sympathy, even

where they did not mingle and penetrate in their proper shape. Much of civilization has always been outside of Christianity, and its leaders and agents have often not thought of Christianity in their work. But they worked in its neighbourhood, among those who owned it, among those who saw it, among those who lived by it: and the conscientiousness, the zeal, the single-mindedness, the spirit of improvement, the readiness for labour and trouble, the considerateness and sympathy, the manly modesty, which are wherever Christianity has "had its perfect work," have developed and sustained kindred tempers, where aims and pursuits, and the belief in which a man habitually lives, have been in a region far away from religion. Take the administration of justice. It *has* been, it *must* be, in society, whether there is religion or not. It was found in Roman times, up to a certain point, in a very remarkable degree of perfection. It has been, it may still be, in Christian times, carried on, and admirably carried on, by men who

do not care for Christianity. I am very far, indeed, from saying that in these times it has always been worthy either of Christianity or civilization. But I suppose we may safely say that it has been distinctly improving through the Christian centuries. We may safely say that in its best and most improved stages it is an admirable exhibition of some of the noblest qualities of human character ; honesty, strength without show, incorruptness, scrupulous care, unwearied patience, desire for right and for truth, and laborious quest of them, public feeling, humanity, compassion even when it was a duty to be stern. There were great and upright Roman magistrates ; but whatever Roman jurisprudence attained to, there was no such administration of justice, where men thought and felt right, and did right, as a matter of course. And is it too much to say that the growing and gathering power of ideas of duty, right, and mercy, derived from Christianity, have wrought and have conquered, even when their source was not formally

acknowledged, even when it was kept at a distance ; and that they have given a security for one of the first essentials of civilization, which is distinctly due to their perhaps circuitous and remote influence ?

But, after all, it may not unreasonably occur to you that I am claiming too much for the civilization of Christian times ; that my account of it is one-sided and unfairly favourable. Putting aside the earlier centuries of confusion and struggle, when it might be urged that real tendencies had not yet time to work themselves clear, what is there to choose, it may be said, between the worst Roman days and many periods of later history, long after Christianity had made good its footing in society ? What do we say to the dislocation, almost the dissolution, of society in great wars,—the English Invasion, the Wars of the League in France, our own civil wars, the municipal feuds in Italy, the Thirty Years' War in Germany ? What to the civilization of the ages like those of

Louis XIV. and Louis XV., full of brilliancy, full of most loathsome unrighteousness and corruption, gilded by the profoundest outward honour for religion? What shall we say of Inquisitions, and Penal Laws, and here, in our own England, of a criminal code which, up to the end of the last century, hanged mere children for a trifling theft? What shall we say of the huge commercial dishonesties of our own age, of our pauperism, of our terrible inequalities and contrasts of wealth and life? What shall we say of a great nation almost going to pieces before our eyes, and even now moving anxiously to a future which no one pretends to foresee? What advantage have we, how is civilization the better for the influence on it of Christianity, if this, and much more like this, is what is shown by the history and the facts of the modern world?

It will at once suggest itself to you that when we speak of civilization we speak of a thing of infinite degrees and variety. Every man in this

congregation stands, probably, at a different point from all his neighbours in the success with which, if I may use the words, he *has made himself a man* : has developed the capacities and gifts which are in him, has fulfilled the purpose and done the work for which he was made to live, has reached "the measure of the fulness of that stature" which he might and was intended to attain. And so with societies, and different times in the history of a society. There have been in Christian times poor and feeble forms of civilization, there have been degenerate ones, as there have been strong ones ; and in the same society there have been monstrous and flagrant inconsistencies, things left undone, unrighted, unnoticed, the neglect of which seems unaccountable, things quietly taken for granted which it is amazing that a Christian conscience could tolerate. Think how long and how patiently good men accepted negro slavery, who would have set the world in flame rather than endure slavery at home. Human nature is way-

ward and strange in the proportion which it keeps in its perceptions of duty, in its efforts and achievements. But for all this it seems to me idle to deny that men in Christian times have reached a higher level, and have kept it, in social and civil life, than they ever reached before, and that this is distinctly to be traced to the presence and action in society of Christian morality.

But this is not what I wanted specially to say. What I want you to notice, as new, since Christianity began to act on society, as unprecedented, as characteristic, is the power of recovery which appears in society in the Christian centuries. What is the whole history of modern Europe but the history of such recoveries? And what is there like it to be found in the ancient world? Dark days have been, indeed, in Christendom. Society seemed to be breaking up, as it did at last at Rome. But wait awhile, and you saw that which you looked for in vain at Rome. The tide began to turn; the energy, the indignation, the resolute,

unflinching purpose of reformation began to show itself; and whether wise or not, whether in its special and definite work a failure or even a mischief, it was at least enough to rouse society, to set it on a new course, to disturb that lethargy of custom which is so fatal, to make men believe that it was not a law of nature or of fate, that "as things had been, things must be." That terrible disease of public and stagnant despair which killed Roman society has not had the mastery yet in Christian ; in evil days, sooner or later, there have been men to believe that they could improve things, even if, in fact, they could not. And for that power of hope, often, it may be, chimerical and hazardous, but hope which has done so much for the improvement of social life, the world is indebted to Christianity. It was part of the very essence of Christianity not to let evil alone. It was bound, it was its instinct, to attack it. Christian men have often, no doubt, mistaken the evil which they attacked: but their acquiescence

in supposed evil, and their hopelessness of a victory for good, would have been worse for the world than their mistakes. The great reforms in Christian days have been very mixed ones ; but they *have been reforms*, an uninterrupted series of attempts at better things ; for society, for civilization, successive and real, though partial recoveries. The monastic life, which was, besides its other aspects, the great civilizing agent in the rural populations ; the varied and turbulent municipal life in the cities ; the institutions in the Middle Ages, on a broad and grand scale, for teaching, for study, for preaching, for the reformation of manners ; the determined and sanguine ventures of heroic enthusiasts, like St. Bernard, Savonarola, or Luther, or of gentler, but not less resolute reformers, like Erasmus and our own Dean Colet ; the varied schemes for human improvement, so varied, so opposed, so incompatible, yet in purpose *one*, of Jesuits, of Puritans, of the great Frenchmen of Port Royal,—all witness

to the undying, unwearied temper which had been kindled in society, and which ensured it from the mere ruin of helplessness and despair. They were all mistakes, you will say perhaps, or full of mistakes. Yes, but we all do our work through mistakes, and the boldest and most successful of us perhaps make the most. They failed in the ambitious completeness, the real one-sidedness and narrowness, of their aim: but they left their mark, if only in this—that they exhibited men in the struggle with evil and the effort after improvement, refusing to give up, refusing to be beaten. But indeed they were more than this. There are none, I suppose, of these great stirrings of society, however little we may sympathise with them, which have not contributed something for which those who come after are the better. The wilder or the feebler ones were an earnest of something more reasonable and serious. They mark and secure, for some important principle or idea, a step which cannot easily be put back.

They show, as the whole history of Christendom, with all its dismal tracts of darkness and blood, seems to me to show, that society in Christian times has somehow or other possessed a security, a charm against utter ruin, which society before them had not ; that it has been able to go through the most desperate crises, and at length throw off the evil, and continue on its path not perhaps unharmed, yet with a new chance of life : that following its course from first to last, we find in it a tough, indestructible force of resistance to decay, a continual, unworn-out spring of revival, renovation, restoration, recovery, and augmented strength, which, wherever it comes from, is most marked and surprising, and which forms an essential difference between Christian society and the conditions of society, before and beyond Christian influences.

I must bring to an end what I have to say. I know quite well that the subject is not finished. But there are various reasons why at present I am

unable to finish it. Yet I hope I shall not have quite wasted your time if I have said anything to make you wish to inquire and to think about this supreme question; the relations of our modern civilization, not only so refined, and so full of arts and appliances and great organizations, but so serious, to those eternal truths which lead up our thoughts to the ultimate destinies of man, to the Throne of the Most High and the Most Holy. Society is debating whether it shall remain Christian or not. I hope that all who hear me, the majority of whom twenty years hence, when I and my contemporaries shall have passed from the scene, will belong to the grown-up generation which then will have the fate of English society in their hands, will learn to reflect on that question with the seriousness which it deserves.

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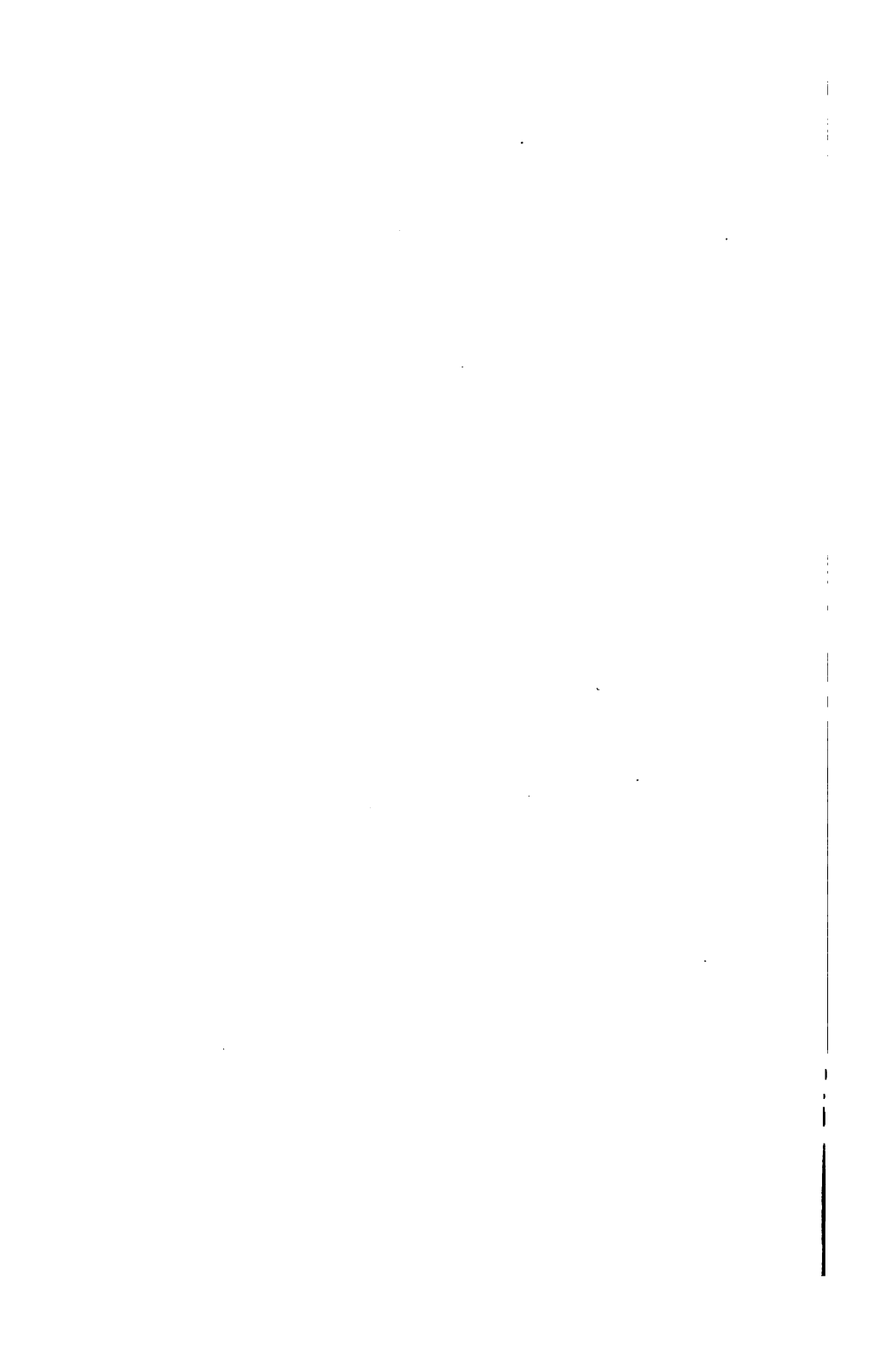
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